

Message Text

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10

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 SAM-01

TRSE-00 /052 W

----- 015235

R 090925Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5713

USIA WASHDC

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, PFOR, XF, LY, LE

SUBJECT: LIBYAN BLUES WITH BEIRUT PRESS

1. SUMMARY. ALL IS NOT WELL AT "AS-SAFIR", LIBYA'S SENIOR MOUTHPIECE IN BEIRUT, ACCORDING TO EXPOSE PRINTED IN PHALANGE PARTY ORGAN AND REPRINTED TODAY IN "AS-SAFIR" ITSELF. DETAILS OF EXPOSE TALLY WITH RUMORS EMBOFFS HAVE BEEN HEARING ABOUT LIBYAN DISSATISFACTION WITH EDITORIAL LONE OF "AS-SAFIR" AND LIBYAN EFFORTS TO CREATE OTHER, MORE DOCILE, PUBLICATIONS, INCLUDING ONE THROUGH MARXIST BLACK SHEEP NEPHEW OF PRESIDENT FRANJIEH. END SUMMARY.

2. "AS-SAFIR", LIBYA'S SENIOR MOUTHPIECE IN BEIRUT, IS CURRENTLY FACED WITH SEVERE CRISIS AS RESULT OF BREAK WITH LIBYA, ACCORDING TO EXPOSE PUBLISHED AUGUST 7 IN PHALANGE PARTY ORGAN "AL-'AMAL" AND REPRINTED AUGUST 8 IN "AS-SAFIR", WHICH
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PRESUMABLY FOUND PARTS OF IT SERVE ITS PURPOSES.

3. ACCORDING TO EXPOSE, AFFAIR BEGAN WHEN LIBYANS DECIDED TO FINANCE NEWSPAPER IN BEIRUT. WORKING THROUGH TALAL SALMAN, ARAB NATIONALIST JOURNALIST THEN AFFILIATED WITH PRO-EGYPTIAN "AS-SAYYAD", LIBYANS PUT UP 3.5 MILLION DOLS FOR LICENSE GRANTED IN SALMAN'S NAME, INITIAL CAPITAL INVESTMENT, AND EXPECTED LOSSES FOR FIRST TWO YEARS. FIRST ISSUE APPEARED IN MARCH 1974 UNDER MOTTO "LEBANON'S NEWSPAPER IN THE ARAB NATION, AND THE ARAB NATION'S NEWSPAPER IN LEBANON". NATURALLY, PAPER WAS MEANT TO FOLLOW LIBYAN LINE, WHICH HAS RECENTLY MEANT THAT IT SHOULD ATTACK REGIMES IN EGYPT, SYRIA, SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT, AND LEBANON. BUT SALMAN'S JOURNALISTIC IMPULSES AND AMBITION APPARENTLY GOT THE BETTER OF HIM, AND HE BEGAN TO IGNORE LIBYA'S POLITICAL DIRECTIVES. IN LAST FEW MONTHS, WHAT HAD BEGUN AS "MISUNDERSTANDING" HAS ESCALATED INTO FULL-SCALE CONFRONTATION RESULTING IN CESSATION OF FURTHER LIBYAN SUBSIDIES TO "AS-SAFIR" AND FINANCING OF ANOTHER, MORE OBEDIENT, MOUTHPIECE, "AL-KIFAH AL-'ARABI", WHICH BEGAN PUBLICATION IN MARCH, 1975. CESSATION OF LIBYAN SUBSIDIES HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY DISRUPTIVE FOR "AS-SAFIR" BECAUSE OF ABNORMALLY HIGH SALARIES IT HAS BEEN PAYING ITS WRITERS IN ORDER TO DRAW THEM AWAY FROM OTHER PUBLICATIONS.

4. ABOVE TALLIES WITH RUMORS EMBOFFS HAVE BEEN HEARING FOR SOME MONTHS BOTH RE LIBYAN DISENCHANTMENT WITH EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE OF "AS-SAFIR" AND LIBYAN EFFORTS TO CREATE OTHER OUTLETS.

5. "AS-SAFIR" HAS, SINCE INCEPTION, MOVED STEADILY AWAY FROM SLAVISH PARROTING OF LIBYAN LINE TO MORE ENLIGHTENED--BUT STILL RADICAL--ARAB NATIONALIST POSITION. AT TIME OF MORGAN KIDNAPPING, FOR INSTANCE, IT PRINTED REMARKABLE FRONT-PAGE EDITORIAL ROUNDLY CRITICIZING THOSE--AND THEY WERE MANY--WHO EQUATED MORGAN'S KIDNAPPING WITH SUPPORT FOR ARAB AND PALESTINIAN CAUSES. SHORTLY THEREAFTER, "AS-SAFIR" CAME UNDER ATTACK IN PFLP/GC ORGAN "ILA AL-AMAM" FOR SUPPORTING AMERICA RPT AMERICA TO DETRIMENT OF ARAB CAUSES.

6. RELATIVE INDEPENDENCE OF "AS-SAFIR" HELPS EXPLAIN NOT ONLY WHY LIBYANS FELT NEED TO FINANCE SECOND DAILY, AL-KIFAH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AL-'ARABI, BUT ALSO WHY THEY ARE CURRENTLY NEGOTIATING FOR A THIRD,--"AS-SAFIR"-- THROUGH SAMIR FRANJIEH, MARXIST BLACK SHEEP NEPHEW OF PRESIDENT FRANJIEH. DEAL, WHICH IS NOT YET FINAL, REPORTEDLY INVOLVES FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLS FOR LICENSE AND PHYSICAL PLANT ALONE.

7. COMMENTT: LIBYANS SEEM SLOW TO LEARN BITTER LESSON OF LEBANESE JOURNALISM THAT, WHILE IT IS EASY TO ENTER "MARKETPLACE

OF IDEAS", IT IS DIFFICULT TO RETAIN CONTROL OF ONE'S SALESMEN
WHEN, AS SOMETIMES HAPPENS, THEY ARE MORE INTERESTED IN BEING
SUCCESSFUL JOURNALISTS THAN HACK WRITERS. "AS-SAFIR", BY
DEVELOPING GOOD NEWS REPORTING WHILE MOVING AWAY FROM TOTAL
IDENTIFICATION WITH LIBYANS, HAS ATTAINED CIRCULATION OF AROUND
12,000. "AL-KIFAH AL-'ARABI", ON OTHER HAND, REMAINS STALLED AT
2,500 LEVEL. NONETHELESS, SUDDEN WITHDRAWAL OF LIBYAN
SUBSIDY IS LIKELY TO FORCE SERIOUS RETRENCHMENT AT "AS-SAFIR"
WHEN PAYMENTS ALREADY MADE ARE EXHAUSTED.
GODLEY

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